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ABSTRACT

School curricula reflect the sociocultural values held by society. As such, curricula may adopt: (1) a philosophically humanistic, individual-sensitive orientation, or (2) an economically-driven, social development orientation. This first orientation supports self-realization and prioritizes a broad-based and multidisciplinary school curriculum. The second orientation supports an economically-driven, social development orientation and prioritizes a technological, competency-based, school curriculum for the purpose of facilitating increased participation in the interconnected global economy. This second orientation is instills humanistically-antagonistic educational values of the dominant economic groups. This curriculum option promotes both cultural normalization inherent to a global money economy and the adoption of western capitalist values geared to increase material wealth at a national level. This paper examines the dilemma of economically-underdeveloped island countries which are to choose between individual well-being and socioeconomic development. The paper looks at how two countries, Jamaica, in the Caribbean, and Fiji, in the South Pacific, have chosen different curriculum options and how their different choices lead to different social, cultural, and economic options. It finds that these different orientations have created different socioeconomic contexts, an economically progressive context in Jamaica marred by increased inequalities between rich and poor, and a socially strengthened context in Fiji identified by "mataqali" resource sharing. (Contains 21 references.) (BT)

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Slow Cultural Approach vs. Radical Materialistic Change: Making the School Curriculum Responsive to Globalisation in Small Island Countries

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Abstract

School curricula reflect the sociocultural values held by society. As such curricula may adopt a philosophically humanistic individual-sensitive orientation or economically-driven social development orientation. This first orientation supports self-realisation and prioritises a broad-based multidisciplinary school curriculum. The second orientation. in contrast. supports an economically-driven social development orientation and prioritises a technological competency-based school curriculum for the purpose of facilitating increased participation in the interconnected global economy. This second orientation is to instil humanistically-antagonistic educational values of the dominant economic groups. This curriculum option promotes both cultural normalisation inherent to a global money economy and the adoption of western capitalist values geared to increase material wealth at a national level.

This paper examines the dilemma of economically-underdeveloped island countries which are to choose between individual well-being and socioeconomic development. It looks at how two countries. Jamaica in the Caribbean, and Fiji in the South Pacific. have chosen different curriculum options and how their different choices lead to different social. cultural and economic outcomes.

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Introduction

This paper examines the influence of sociocultural values and global economic market forces in shaping school curricula in small island states. It looks at how two African-Caribbean-Pacific (ACP) island states, Jamaica in the Western Caribbean and Fiji in the South Pacific, are torn between two conflicting ideologies: a humanistic ideology for societal well-being and a materialistic ideology for economic progress. These two ideologies underpin the philosophic design of their school curricula and their different ideological curriculum emphasis reflect their country's preferred policy orientation. This paper discusses these curriculum orientations and their differential socioeconomic impact on Jamaica and Fiji's societies.

Impact of global economic forces on school curricula

The new socioeconomic order is characterised by an interconnected globalised fast-changing environment. This is supported by an increasingly technologically oriented curriculum geared to build a country's skilled human resources upon which economic development is contingent. Opting for economic development remains a challenge for small ACP economies, such Jamaica and Fiji, and starkly impacts on their social and educational structures. The degree of acceptable structural changes is determined by their current prevalent ideological approach to curriculum design and implementation. This varies from a humanistically individual-oriented approach at one end of the curriculum continuum to a materialistic economically-driven approach at the other end. A country's differential urge towards increasing material wealth is reflected in its different positioning along the curriculum continuum. For example, both Jamaica and Fiji acknowledge the fundamental role of formal education in promoting economic development and this acknowledgement is manifested, albeit to a different extent, in the introduction of competency-based curricula. It is now widely recognised by economy-concerned education decision-makers that "training is one of the main driving forces behind economic take-off" (Pair, 1998, p. 251) hence the schools' mandate is to provide this expertly trained workforce upon which economic take-off is contingent. This underscores the close interconnected relationship between education, economic growth and material wealth (Bertrand, 1998; Clayton, 2000; Evans, 2001).

Discrepant conceptions of education

Education, in its narrow scope, is perceived primarily a utilitarian provider of employment-targeted skills necessary for participation in the globalised market. Students, for instance, increasingly opt for practical potentially money-earning school subjects. Examples of this are students' choice for subjects like technical drawing over French by Jamaican students for the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) and accounting over history by Indo-Fijians for the Fiji Junior Certificate (FJC). Both Jamaicans and Indo-Fijians, one of Fiji's two main ethnic groups, expect lucrative benefits from their education. However, this expectation is not shared by native Fijians who value first and foremost cooperation and community membership. It is interesting to note, in passing, that Fiji provides a unique example of differential expectations of curriculum; this is because Fiji's two main ethnic groups, the indigenous Fijians and the Indians prioritise different educational objectives leading to their different curriculum interpretations and operationalisations: on one hand, the native Fijians support education for strengthening communal values whereas, on the other hand, the Indians support education for ensuring wealth accretion. This distinction needs to be underscored, here, because of the associated educational implications and sociopolitical tensions.

Re-shaping Jamaican education

The purpose of formal education in Jamaica is rapidly shifting away from its traditional humanistic and elitist intent towards a pragmatic utilitarian function. Miller explained that in the post-war period, "the traditional academic curriculum focused on the humanities, languages, and natural sciences, but now the curriculum has been expanded to include technical and vocational subjects, including agriculture" (1990, p. 363). This move was confirmed with the establishment of the Caribbean Examination Council (CXC) at secondary level in 1974

and recently with the establishment of the University of Technology at tertiary level in 1995. The University of Technology, Jamaica (UTech) is a stark example of the importance now placed upon post-secondary education to train skilled human capital in Jamaica. This is indicated by its fast development over a few decades. Established in 1958 as the Jamaica Institute of Technology, it became the College of Arts, Science of Technology (CAST) a few years later, and finally it acquired its enhanced university status. This rapidly expanding emergent university - with a substantial enrolment of approximately 7,000 full-time and part-time students - evidence the changing Jamaican educational framework. In particular, this highlights the momentous mandate bestowed upon tertiary institutions to bring socio-economic gains to Jamaica and material well-being to trained Jamaicans. This gives a new dimension to university education. As a result, Jamaica's university education now embraces a utilitarian ideology, at UTech, whilst it maintains a traditional humanistic ideology, at the University of the West Indies (UWI).
In contrast to UTech, the older prestigious UWI, with its strict entry requirements, remains impervious to the delivery of a simple skill-based professionally-oriented education and supports a traditional scholastic research-based humanistic education for selected students from eleven English-speaking Caribbean island states. Likewise, the University of the South Pacific (USP) in Fiji continues to offer a traditional British-based university education to twelve Pacific island states in spite of recurrent political upheavals (Caston, 1993).

Socioeconomic mobility through migration
The determination to access post-secondary high-level job-specific skills has spurred migration to economically-developed countries in both Fiji and Jamaica.
Fiji, in particular, has limited post-secondary education. The Fiji Institute of Technology (FIT) provides low level training and does not respond to the needs of students seeking university-certified professional skills. The absence of a job-training university in Fiji, such as UTech in Jamaica, has contributed to the continuous migratory flow of students, primarily Indo-Fijian students, to Australian and New Zealand tertiary institutions. These overseas institutions offer these sought-after professional credentials facilitating upward socioeconomic mobility.
A similar trend is observed among students from the higher socioeconomic groups in Jamaica. The determination of young Jamaicans to raise their social standing by pursuing job-specific studies in North America or the United Kingdom, that is through migration, is a major sociohistorical feature of Jamaica's education. Errol Miller remarked that: "Whether for reasons of upward social mobility available locally or economic advancement through migration, education in the Commonwealth Caribbean has always been a major means of escaping persistent poverty and of achieving personal recognition in society" (1998, p. 140). Post-secondary education, in particular, provides access to gainful professional employment and it is now a means and an end to migrate to economically prosperous first world countries and be part of the globalised market (Rivzi & Lingard, 2000).

Meeting the educational challenge of economic globalisation

A major challenge of 21st century Education is to support an ever-increasingly interconnected technologically-reliant globalised economy. Jamaica and Fiji meet this challenge to varying degrees. Jamaica opts for implementing economy-responsive educational programmes and diversifying curriculum offerings at both secondary and tertiary levels. Notwithstanding the relevance of skills-acquisition in a modern developing economy, Fiji yet maintains a tenuous resistance to providing utilitarian university education.

Upholding communal values in Fiji's education
This is evident at USP where academic staff support academic research and advocate value life-long humanistic learning. The narrower scope of Fiji higher education with its resolutely academic focus appears to distance university education from economic development issues. This distanciation between education and economy, however, has helped preserve fundamental Fijian social structures. Interestingly, the associated slow economic progress has barely impacted on Fijian island communities but, conversely, it has enabled them to maintain a

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stable sociohierarchical organization. In other words, the 'mataqali', that is the Fijian clan, remains a self-regulating economic entity which is, to a large extent, economically self-reliant for its prosperity. As this self-reliance is strongly dependent upon maintaining close communal ties, primacy is given to community well-being over individual needs (Toren, 1986). This ideological societal stance has manifest social benefits at the community level but results in fewer economic gains at the national level. This is because of the lower value granted to individual as against group achievements and the corresponding lack of in-group competition for the purpose of ensuring communal harmony (Boufoy-Bastick, 1999; Tavola, 1990, 1991; Thaman, 1993; Tierney, 1980). Similarly, Fijian students are disinclined to compete in school, that is to raise academically above their peers. These group-enhancing Fijian specificities promote, to some extent, an adverse comfortable indolence which is inimical to economic progress and which preempts participation in the global market.

Promoting individual achievements in Jamaica's education

As opposed to Fiji, Jamaica responds positively to the rhetoric of global discourse and supports investment in human capital and life-long learning to sustain a knowledge-intensive modern economy. The establishment of a progressive technological university described above is such an example of education servicing the economy. Its educational programmes are focused on spurring national development. To this end, degrees are offered in Jamaica's key economic sectors such as tourism, business and engineering. Graduating students are expected to have acquired relevant job-specific skills to adeptly and efficiently enter the competitive global work arena. This education orientation stresses individual achievements and encourages self-seeking competition for the claimed national good. Although this ideologically individual-centred pragmatic education is mediated by a timid humanistic curriculum core, which, at UTech is delivered by the Department of Liberal Studies, it is primarily geared to building Jamaica's human resource capital upon which future economic prosperity is contingent.

Dangers of prioritising individual-centred educational ideologies

Human resource capital-building education orientation prioritises economically-driven social development which is based upon individual material gains. The effectiveness of this top-down orientation plays down grass-root social development and it postulates that a country's increasing material wealth will eventually filter down to the less privileged educationally-marginalised socioeconomic groups. Although this may happen, the filtering down often takes time to reach the most destitute social groups and this results in an increasing economic gap between the higher and the lower socioeconomic groups, as it is the case in Jamaica. This widening gap is accompanied by rising social violence and community destruction (Bastick, 2002; Chevannes, 2000; Miller, 1999; Narcisse, 2000). These, themselves, contribute further to preventing the Jamaican urban poor from educationally-dependent upward social mobility. The rampant violence, particularly in downtown schools, and the lack of social harmony in urban communities, proscribe students' learning and impair education delivery. This is the Jamaican paradox, "that of large-scale social mobility coexisting with widening inequalities of opportunity" (Evans, 2001, p. 150). These inequalities are also a cause and an outcome of differential take up of educational opportunities. This has been noted by Evans (2001, p. 3) who reported that: "Although access to secondary education has improved for the children of the poor, they are still underrepresented at this level of education". This under-representation is not only associated with differential educational provisions but also with educationally-inimical cultural values (Evans, 2001; Miller, 1990; Solomon, 1992). Education suggests compliance, self-discipline and self-control whereas the culture of the poor is anchored in subversion, self-protection and uncurbed self-fulfilment. Reconciling the educational values with the social values of the poor seems, in Jamaica at the present time, an almost insurmountable undertaking.

Conclusion and summary

Jamaica and Fiji are two former British colonies with British-based education systems (Boufoy-Bastick, 2000). However, these two island societies have adopted different economic policies since their independence (Jamaica in 1962 and Fiji in 1972), and these have been translated into different socio-educational policies. On one hand,

Jamaica has opted for national development, that is for social and economic policies aimed to spur the country's economic growth. The rationale for prioritising national development is that economic prosperity eventually benefits all socioeconomic groups.

On the other hand, Fiji shows greater concern for socio-structural maintenance, that means that a lower priority is given to increasing national wealth and participating in the competitive global world market. These two different orientations, one economic and the other social, also determine national educational policies and school-based curriculum implementations. The first orientation entails the adoption of western capitalist values of the dominant economic groups which is geared to increase the country's material wealth. The second orientation is supported by humanistic community-sensitive values promoting social cohesion and communal welfare. The first orientation encourages competition and determination to achieve in school for gaining future job-related financial rewards. The second orientation encourages nonchalance and cooperation with one peers to ensure group cohesiveness. These different orientations have created different socioeconomic contexts, an economically progressive context in Jamaica marred by increased inequalities between rich and poor, and a socially strengthened context in Fiji identified by 'mataqali''s resource sharing.

Jamaica and Fiji are two examples highlighting how educational values reflect the sociocultural values held by society.

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